



What Is an Echocardiogram?

An echocardiogram is a test that takes moving pictures of the heart with sound waves. Your doctor might use this test to look at your heart's structure and to check how well your heart is working.

An echocardiogram is also called an echo test or heart ultrasound. You don't have to stay in the hospital for this test. It's not surgery.



An echocardiogram is a simple, painless test that uses sound waves to take pictures of your heart.

Why do I need an echo test?

You might need this test if you have:

- A heart murmur
- Damaged heart valves
- Unexplained chest pains
- Had rheumatic fever, which can inflame your heart
- A heart problem present at birth (congenital heart defect)
- Had a heart attack
- Had a stroke

How is it done?

Echo tests are done by trained health care professionals called sonographers. You may have the test done in your health care professional's office, an emergency room, an operating room, a hospital clinic or a hospital room.

The test is painless and has no side effects. It usually takes less than an hour.

During the test:

- You'll lie on a bed on your left side or back.
- The sonographer will put special gel on a probe and move it over your chest.
- Sound waves will travel down the probe and pick up images of your heart and valves. No X-rays will be used, and you won't be exposed to radiation.

- Your heart's movements can be seen on a video screen.
- A video or a photograph can be made of the pictures.
- You can sometimes watch your heart on the screen during the test.

Sometimes the probe needs to be closer to your heart to give clearer pictures. If that happens, you may need a special test called a transesophageal echocardiogram (TEE).

During a TEE:

- You might get medication to help you relax and a numbing fluid sprayed in the back of your throat.
- Then, a cardiologist (heart doctor) will gently pass a tube with a probe on the end of it down your throat and into the esophagus (the canal connecting your mouth to your stomach).
- Sound waves will create images as explained above, but from the inside of your body.
- When the test is finished, the heart doctor will gently pull the probe out.
- You may feel a need to cough.

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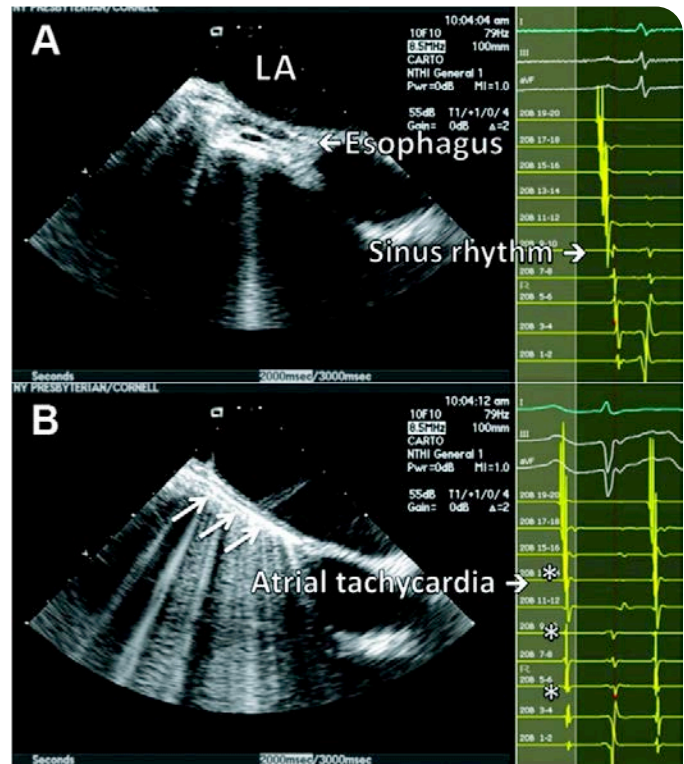
What Is an Echocardiogram?

What can the echo show?

- The size and shape of your heart
- How well your heart is working overall
- If a wall or section of heart muscle is weak and not working correctly
- If you have problems with your heart's valves
- If you have a blood clot
- How you are responding to certain treatments

What happens after the test?

- Your sonographer will help you clean the gel from your chest.
- If you had medication to help you relax, you will be monitored until it wears off.
- Your health care professional will talk with you after looking at your echo images and discuss what they show.



An example of an echocardiogram

HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit heart.org to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
- 2 Sign up for our monthly *Heart Insight* e-news for heart patients and their families at HeartInsight.org.
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at SupportNetwork.heart.org.

Do you have questions for your doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write down questions for the next time you see your health care professional.

For example:

When will I know the results?

Will I need more tests?

MY QUESTIONS:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk of heart disease, manage your condition or care for a loved one. Visit heart.org/AnswersByHeart to learn more.